

Teacher Education in Early Childhood Care and Education: Issues and Concerns

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Abstract

The staff running the ECCE programme is the single most important factor in determining the quality of the programme, yet is the most neglected aspect of the programme. Teacher in the ECCE context is the person who takes care of the education rather than the care component, and as care and education are integral part of ECCE, the training for the teachers at this level requires a perspective different from that of the teacher education addressing elementary and secondary level of schooling. The ECCE teacher education operates in various modes from certificate courses of a few weeks duration to bachelor and post graduate degree levels. As we are gearing up to meet the increased demands of the ECCE teachers due to the implementation of Right to Education Act, we need more programmes in ECCE at degree level to fulfil the objective of providing quality ECCE programmes which support the formal system of education by preparing children in a genuine manner. This paper also substantiates that there is research evidence that the degree level teacher education of ECCE has a positive impact on ECCE outcomes.

Introduction

The term Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) refers to a philosophy of providing opportunities/ experiences to young children upto eight years of age in order to promote their holistic development as well as providing services and support systems

to communities and families to meet the needs of their young children (NCERT, 2006). The aim of ECCE is to provide optimal cognitive, physical and social development of children from vulnerable sections of society including first generation learners. The ECCE is

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expected to promote goals of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) by preparing kids for formal schooling and also by freeing the girl children engaged in sibling care.

Now ECCE is considered as vital and significant if India is to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) goals due to increased awareness. To achieve these goals it is not only necessary to expand the facilities for ECCE but also improve the quality of ECCE which is largely dependent upon the quality of care-givers, workers and teachers engaged in ECCE.

Government's resolve to give importance to pre-primary education can be traced back to the various reports and policy pronouncements after Independence:

- Input for enrolment and retention of children in primary schools had hailed pre-primary education as 'an essential adjunct' of the national system of education.
- Early Child Development Committee headed by Ms Mina Swaminathan (1972-73), while laying emphasis on pre-primary education called for an integrated approach to child development.
- The National Policy on Education (1986) and Programme of Action (POA) (1992) had a distinct section on Early Childhood Care and Education. The Policy stipulates a "high priority" to ECCE "both as a

feeder and a strengthening factor for primary education". POA called for universalisation of ICDS by the year 2000 and widening the scope of *anganwadis* to include crèches. It also laid emphasis on participation of parents and improved training of *anganwadi* workers.

- National Nutrition Policy (1993) considered children below six years as high-risk groups and gave them high priority. National Nutritional Mission was launched to address this problem.
- National Commission for Children (1992) protects the rights of children with a strong legal base.
- National Policy on Empowerment of Women (2001) provides for childcare facilities including crèches at work places.
- The National Health Policy (NHP) (2002) considers 0-6 year age group as targets for reducing Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) to 30/1000 live births and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) to 100/100000 per year.
- National Plan of Action for Children (2005) ensures every child's survival, development protection and participation.
- National Curriculum Framework (2005) considers ECCE as significant for the holistic development of the child and emphasised two years of pre-schooling.

The Quality Concerns

The SSA Joint Review Mission (2010) notes that it is very critical to emphasise the need for a holistic and enriching Early Childhood Education for each child before entering primary school. This is especially relevant in the context of the Right to Education (RTE) Act and its meaningful implementation. (Now the Government is planning to have one year preparatory class in all schools from the next academic year). A child exposed to ECE programmes not only has robust socio-emotional adjustment skills, s/he is also able to be cognitively mature enough to transit to the primary level with ease and confidence. Some children were seen to be dropping out because of health problems. This again needs to be addressed through a proper early childhood development programme that addresses nutrition and health needs of pre-school children.

The policies cannot be implemented unless supported by necessary infrastructure, human resources and the active participation of the stakeholders – nursery teachers, ECE workers, parents, community and the government. This article is dealing with concerns and issues of teacher education in ECCE though there are other ECE workers and care providers.

According to Ackerman (2003), many significant researches support the positive benefits of quality Early Care and Education (ECE) for later developmental and academic outcomes. The benefits are more marked in the case

of children from deprived sections (NCERT, 2005). If India is to attain the MDG and EFA goals, the quality of ECCE programme is of vital significance. Ray (2007) in the report on Status of Education states that the Delhi government is going to open 300 ECCE centres, and add every consecutive year the same number till all primary schools have a preschool. It is a good attempt in the right direction. The recruitment process of the ECCE workers must have been over by now. The questions are: Who is qualified to take up those positions? How are these people trained?

High-quality care is essential to the optimal development of young children. In India, the benefit of ECCE is limited to a few children. Research studies have looked into the quality of ECCE programmes in Mumbai (Kamath), Pratham centres and also in Tamil Nadu (Suriakanthi, A. and Swaminathan, Mina, 2000). In many of the ECCE programmes, the education component was neglected as they were reduced to mere feeding centres. The teacher or the care giver is not qualified more often. According to Kaul (2000), all preschool teachers were females and 56.4 per cent teachers were trained in Jammu and Kashmir. One of the major challenges that we need to tackle in the area of ECCE will be that of teacher education.

Teacher Education Programmes in ECCE

Teacher education is concerned with the preparation and initiation of pre-service teachers and capacity building

of in-service teachers. In the context of ECCE, there are many programmes dealing with the preparation of such ECCE personnel in India. Children in the age group below three years need more care and support, there is a need for preparation of personnel for child care. The three to six-year-old children are to be prepared to enter the formal system of education, and the role of teacher is more crucial and all the teacher education programmes in ECCE cover them.

In our country, there are wide variety of ECE programmes and also ECE training programmes which may be classified under following heads:

- Pre-service courses (being run by different state-owned and private institutions)
- In-service courses (exclusively meant for state-level key functionaries of SSA/SCERTs and functionaries of Integrated Child Development Services Scheme)
- ECE Diploma/Certificate Courses (being offered by distance learning institutions like Indira Gandhi National Open University, National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and several other State-specific open universities) and
- Specific ECE intervention-based training inputs.

Pre-service courses: Several teacher training initiatives (Integrated Pre-Primary and Primary Teacher's Training, Nursery/Pre-Primary Teacher's Training, Vocational Training

in Child Care and Education) have been set up by different state-owned and private institutions. Integrated Pre-Primary and Primary Teacher's Training is being run since many years. The programme, which is recognised by NCTE and is commonly known as NTT, aims at preparing teachers for pre-school stage (3-6 years) and for the first two grades (6-8 years) of the primary stage. Besides this, the curriculum of higher/senior secondary stage of education (+2) in CBSE, NIOS and many State education boards have also included early childhood education as an area of vocational education. The content of this course includes both theory and practice components of ECE. After completion of this course, the students can either opt for higher education or for employment or self-employment in the ECCE centres/school.

In-service Courses: In-service programmes at the induction stage of the job as well as ongoing professional development programmes in ECCE are conducted by different agencies.

The National Institute for Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) organises the Comprehensive Training Strategy for ICDS functionaries at different levels. It is the major in-service training initiative in which every functionary — the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), the Assistant Child Development Project Officer (ACDPO), the Supervisor, the Anganwadi worker (AWW) and Anganwadi helper (AWH) — has to

undergo job training at the initial stage of taking up the assignment, and refresher training every two years. So far as training inputs under ECE in these programmes are concerned, out of 26 working days job training being imparted to CDPOs, Supervisors and AWWs, four days intensive training is being imparted on ECE only. Similarly in refresher training, which is of five days duration, the ECE is being covered by allocating three to four sessions. For the use of ICDS trainers, NIPCCD organises the skill training programmes specifically on ECE of five days duration. The training inputs concerning ECE in all these programmes also emphasise on developing the skills for preparation of indigenous teaching material.

Provisions were also made in DPEP and SSA initiatives to not only train the ECE functionaries but also the community representatives and members of the women's groups as well, because they have been vested with the responsibility of the management of ECE centres. Regular induction and in-service training programmes were imparted to the ECE functionaries using specially designed training curriculum. In most such cases, the pre-school kit and training content has followed the model developed by NCERT. The members of the ECE resource groups set up in various SCERTs and DIETs were also trained and sent on exposure visits to learn from the examples of ECE interventions. Further, under DPEP/SSA initiatives, the AWWs from selected AWCs were trained on specific aspects

of ECE as a part of the convergence strategy with ICDS.

NCERT also conducts a diploma programme for those functionaries who are already engaged in provisioning pre-school services. In addition to above such training inputs, various SCERTs also contribute to the professional development of early childhood educators using a cascade model. Under this model, these institutes of repute first train the ECE master trainers, who, in turn, impart the training to supervisory and grass root functionaries.

The open and distance learning mode of training: There are many private and government initiatives offering certificate and diploma courses concerning ECE. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), and several other State Specific Open Universities (SSOUs) like Kota Open University of Rajasthan, Bhoj Open University of MP, Rajarshi Purushottam Das Tandon Open University of UP and Distance Education Department of Jamia Millia Islamia also offer specialised certificate and/or diploma courses in ECCE through open and distance learning system.

Accreditation of Various Degrees in ECE Teacher Training

The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), which is a statutory body, has laid down the norms and standards for two programmes, namely

Pre-School and Nursery Teacher Education Programmes. These norms laid down by NCTE are now expected to impact on quality. Besides laying down the norms and standards of teacher education courses concerning ECCE, the NCTE has also undertaken the task of accreditation of the institutions offering pre-primary and nursery teacher training courses. Further, keeping in view the ground realities obtaining in different parts of the country and to ensure the adequate supply of suitably qualified teachers for the growing area of ECE, the following four programmes have been further proposed by NCTE. These are:

- Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education (CECCE)
- Diploma in ECCE and Early Primary Education (DECCE and EPED)
- Diploma in ECCE and Primary Education (DECCE and PEd) and
- Post Graduate Diploma in ECCE (PGDECCE.)

Besides these courses, we have three-year Bachelor (BSc) and integrated BSc.Ed (Home Science) and also Masters (MSc/MA) in Child Development and B.Ed (Nursery Education) and M.Ed (ECCE). The Home Science Departments of different universities also offer Ph.D in ECCE. In India there are many international universities also offering teacher education programmes in ECCE. The curricula of all these courses are also

different, though these may have common components of Child Development, Child Psychology, Nutrition, Community Relationship, School Organisation and Management appropriate for the level. Some of them also have in their curricula different approaches to ECCE, policy initiatives and research in ECCE.

The provision of centre-based ECCE in India is available through three distinct channels—government, private and non-governmental. According to Mehta (2007) the percentage of primary schools having attached pre-primary sections increased from 14.27 in 2002-03 to 15.32 in 2003-04, further to 17.93 in 2004-05 and to 20.02 in 2005-06. There are 26.56 per cent primary schools with upper primary and 39.98 per cent primary with upper primary and secondary schools or higher secondary schools having attached pre-primary schools. The number of pre-primary schools are increasing year after year. There is no data available on qualifications of pre-school teachers and also schools having day care facilities. According to the 2001 Census, India has a population of 158 million children between the ages 0-6. India has the largest child population in the world. Programmes and interventions for children aged 0-6 are provided by the government, the private sector and NGOs. The government sector covers only 22 per cent of the population (MHRD, 2003). The private sector covers about one crore children. Though exact figures are

not available, about 20 million children are supposed to be covered by NGOs. The government sector employs persons with wide range of qualifications from certificate, diploma or degree in ECE or nursery education, whereas, the NGOs and private sector employ persons with none or highly qualified B.Ed, M.Ed, Ph.Ds with pre-primary training. There are about 15 institutions offering Diploma in ECCE in Delhi. These institutions are affiliated to SCERT, Delhi. There is a bachelor degree course in education (B.Ed(Nursery)) conducted by Jamia Millia Islamia, and the Child Development Centre of Jamia Millia Islamia offers a two-year MA in Child Development. The reality is that majority of the teachers who are working as nursery teachers are trained after the plus two level through a diploma in ECE, (NTT). But it is high time we have more degree and post graduate courses in ECE similar to what we have in JMI. Most of the nursery teachers employed in Balwadis or Anganwadis are trained for a duration of two weeks to two months. The pre-primary sector is primarily covered by the Balwadis or Anganwadis, and the independent nursery schools or nursery schools attached to regular schools are very few.

When we look at the history of secondary education in India even at the secondary level, the teachers were trained through certificate courses to begin with, and later through degree and diploma courses. The Department of Teacher Training of Jamia Millia

started in 1938 with a certificate course for preparation of teachers, and later started the diploma programme of two years duration after a decade, and the B.Ed courses after another decade. There are many studies which give evidence to the fact that a degree course prepares the teachers in a better way. Even today we find many nurseries run by private initiatives, being run by teachers not trained in ECE.

Teacher Education and ECCE Environments

As there are many more reports on how the teacher's qualifications lead to better learning environments, we need to improve the training and recruitment in ECCE. When will India reach the level of having a minimum bachelor's degree in ECE or child development for a teacher at pre-school level? As we have to cope up with the demand of increasing the number of preschools, the government should increase pre-service training as well as in-service training facilities for ECCE professionals.

Kagan and others (2007) in their book *The Early Care and Education Teaching Workforce at the Fulcrum: An Agenda for Reform* states that there are nearly five million individuals who have the responsibility of caring for and educating nearly two thirds of the American children under age five who spend time in non-parental care. What is the Indian scenario? Available institutional arrangements for pre-school teacher education are grossly inadequate considering the expected

expansion of pre-school education sector in the coming years. Also, there is need to evolve specially designed programmes at the degree and post-degree levels for the training of teacher educators. One possibility is to develop the M.Ed as a teacher educator training programme with specialisation in pre-school education.

Quality of the ECCE and Teacher Education

Fontaine and others (2006) provide outcome information in regard to a state-funded Enhancement Grant Project in which childcare facilities' personnel were provided with professional development activities to assist them in evaluating their early care and learning programmes, and planning and implementing enhancement activities. After three years, a significant improvement resulted in several areas critical to high-quality care for young children.

An important issue for early childhood education policy is the extent to which classroom quality could be improved by raising requirements for teacher educational qualifications. A number of empirical studies report the effects of teacher education on ECE outcomes, and more specifically, whether or not a bachelor's degree is an important aspect of ECE teacher preparation (Ninoes, 2006).

Kelley and Camilli (2008) conducted a meta analysis of the Impact of Teacher Education on Outcomes in Center-Based Early

Childhood Education Programmes. The primary focus of this study was whether completion of a bachelor's degree has a positive impact on ECE outcomes. The analysis indicated that effects on quality outcomes from teachers with a bachelor's degree (the treatment group) were significantly different from those teachers with less education (the comparison group). In standard deviation units, the average effect was 0.16 standard deviations ($p < .05$) higher for teachers with a bachelor's degree than for their non-bachelor's degree counterparts. There are, however, two caveats. First, the effect size is relatively small, though significant. Therefore, the benefit of the requirement that ECE teachers having a bachelor's degree must be seen in light of the potential benefits of using the requisite funds some other way. Second, the research underlying this effect size is correlational in nature. Thus, it is possible that any number of factors, aside from having a bachelor's degree, cause this effect.

In yet another study, NICHD and Duncan (2003) used data collected from a sample of 1300 children in nine states. The study focused on the effects of teacher education (measured as total years of formal education), staff/child ratio, and group size. To test whether programme structural quality was related to child cognitive and academic ability, the authors compared three statistical methods, adjusted for family selection bias. The methods included: multiple regression models of 54-

month child outcomes, longitudinal models of 24 and 54-month child outcomes, and residualised change models of 54-month child outcomes adjusting for the 24-month outcomes. Structural quality was found to predict cognitive outcomes at 54 months. More specifically, teacher education demonstrated consistent, positive associations with children's 54-month achievement outcomes, including mathematics and reading skills, and phonological knowledge. During the past 10 to 15 years, research on the relationship between participation in Early Care and Education (ECE) programmes and child development has grown substantially.

Arnett (1989) conducted an analysis on a small sample of 59 pre-school teachers from child care centres in Bermuda. Teachers had completed either half or the entire two-year ECE training programme offered by Bermuda College, had bachelor's degrees in ECE, or had no training. Teacher attitudes and behaviours were assessed using a combination of questionnaires and classroom observations. No significant differences were found between teachers who had completed either half or the entire training programme. With respect to classroom behaviours, teachers who had completed half or the entire programme were rated higher in positive interactions than teachers with no training, while teachers with a bachelor's degree in ECE received the highest rating of the three groups for positive interactions. Furthermore, teachers who

had completed either half or the entire programme were rated as less detached and punitive towards children than teachers with no training, while teachers with a B.A. in ECE were rated as the least detached and punitive. A similar pattern was seen for teacher attitudes.

A large scale study, the National Child Care Staffing Study in United States (NCCSS; Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips, 1990), included 664 classrooms from 227 centres in five large cities obtained by a stratified random sampling procedure. Information on teacher characteristics, including teacher education, was collected through staff interviews. Teacher behaviour and classroom process quality were assessed by direct observation, where process quality refers to children's direct experiences in the ECE setting, including their interactions with teachers and peers, and exposure to materials and activities that encourage learning. Results of one analysis indicated that teacher education, measured as total years of education, was positively related to greater sensitivity and more appropriate care giving in preschool classrooms. The second analysis involved a comparison of four groups of teachers with the following levels of education: high school diploma, some college, associate's degree (A.A.), and bachelor's degree (B.A.) or higher. According to the results, teachers with a B.A. or higher were more sensitive, less harsh, less detached and provided more appropriate care giving to children than

teachers with an A.A., some college or a high school diploma. When ECE training was compared across groups, no significant differences were found between teachers with a bachelor's degree and teachers with a B.A. in ECE; both groups demonstrated greater teaching skills compared to teachers with an A.A., and teachers with no training. In addition, teachers with college-level training in ECE but no B.A. demonstrated greater teaching skills compared to teachers with an A.A. and teachers with no training.

As there are many more reports on how the teacher qualifications lead to better learning environments (Whitebook, 2003, Barnett, 2003), we need to improve the training and recruitment in ECCE. The minimum degree for a teacher at preschool level should be a bachelor degree in ECE or child development. As we have to cope up with the demand of increasing the number of preschools, the government should increase pre-service training as well as in-service training for ECE professionals.

As ECE settings have a direct relationship with quality of care which is related to teacher/caregiver qualifications, some measures are suggested for ECE teacher education below:

- (1) **Regulatory efforts to improve** ECE teachers qualifications, including barriers to improving qualifications; the NCTE (2006) has published the curriculum for ECE for certificate, diploma and degree programmes.

- (2) **Professional development** efforts, including a description of the Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Programme as part of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In the case of NCLB, the teachers' professional development through improvement in subject knowledge is highlighted (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2006). As part of SSA, ICDS, etc. professional development of ECE professionals is to be highlighted. Attending refreshers should help the ECE professionals grow in stature.

In March 2006, Chancellor Reed of California University convened a statewide meeting with leaders across sectors of the higher education and K-12 communities focused on *Building and Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce: Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities*. Researchers in this field asserted that the pipeline for professionals serving the early learning population is not sufficiently robust to meet the state's *current* need for a well-qualified workforce. Issues of programme growth, alternative programme delivery systems, access, faculty recruitment and preparation, and articulation were discussed during the March 3 summit. In India, we have very little effort and awareness for such a need. The Child Development Centre of Jamia Millia Islamia, and also at Ambedkar University are steps in the right direction.

(3) **Career lattices;** Educationists pointed out that pre-primary teachers are on the lowest rung of the teaching hierarchy (Malarvizhi, 2006). The pay structure needs to be revised to make ECE professional at par with others in the school (TGT). The quality will be adversely affected if the teachers are not paid well. As the ECCE is a very crucial input in the overall educational scenario, the career opportunities of ECE professional cannot be ignored.

(4) The government as well as private sector should pay attention to training and recruitment at the ECCE level. Now any training or no training is considered suitable for ECCE.

To conclude, the ECCE workers at all levels need better training and education, therefore, the government policies and public awareness regarding ECCE as well as efforts to develop programmes both preservice and in service await great zeal to meet the demands of quality and quantity.

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